

BLIZZARD OF '49, WYOMING PUBLIC TELEVISION ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

Speaker 1: Patricia, just give me your name for the Camera.

Patricia: Patricia Garner.

Speaker 1: Okay, and so the second day after new years day, the blizzard set in. Where were you?

Patricia: We were working on a ranch south of Crawford, between Crawford and [Scottsbluff 00:00:21].

Speaker 1: And what were you doing on the ranch?

Patricia: We were just hired help. It was a big ranch. Dr. Watson's ranch.

Speaker 1: Was that a cattle ranch?

Patricia: A cattle ranch, mm-hmm (affirmative). The storm started on Sunday, and the next morning it was terrible. It drifted so high, we walked over the trees to go to work. It was something else. We lived in a little three room house, and we lived in the living room because it was so cold in the kitchen. The snow pulled the curtains off the windows, that's how deep. The night it started I was frying pancakes and the sparks were just flying, I had to have the towel around my handle to hang onto it.

Speaker 1: The sparks from static electricity?

Patricia: Mm-hmm (affirmative), like Jimmy was saying happened at his house. I've never seen anything like it, but we just had a chimney with a stovepipe, you know? That probably made it worse.

Speaker 1: Did the snow infiltrate the house a lot?

Patricia: Just mostly in the kitchen. That's where it pulled the curtains off the wall, off the window.

Speaker 1: And so, what were your responsibilities?

Patricia: Well, I didn't really have any, my husband worked on this ranch. He lost a lot of cattle. One [cattle 00:01:56] field had sixty-five head of cattle, some of them

even [00:02:00] standing up, frozen. Most of them were laying down with their heads like that, and they never could, they weren't any good.

Speaker 1: Was there also any sheep on the ranch?

Patricia: No [ranch 00:02:12], no sheep.

Speaker 1: Just pure cattle?

Patricia: Mm-hmm (affirmative). [They fed 00:02:15] with horses.

Speaker 1: Did your, your husband had to go out during the blizzard?

Patricia: Well, they [finally 00:02:22] didn't after about the second day because it was so bad, so deep, and you couldn't see, you couldn't really do anything. We stayed there like two weeks before we had to help his dad, but one day while we were still at Watson's, he and another hired man rode to a different place to check on some Cattle. They went in the house and were standing by the stove, and this man had whiskey in his back pocket, and it broke, and it got warm, and he had to ride the rest of the way back in wet jeans.

Speaker 1: It was a what? It was a flask?

Patricia: A flask of whiskey in his back pocket. They didn't say anything, they just left.

Speaker 1: And your husband didn't get into any serious trouble then, as far as getting, you know, lost in the snow or anything like that?

Patricia: Well, one night he said he'd try to take some bales of hay to his dad's, and he had this horse and he pulled him on a sled, and he was going to stay all night, well the horse had got loose and came home, so they didn't know where he was, but he was fine, he was still at his dad's. About two weeks later, we quit Dr. Watson's and went home to help his dad. He had like 180 [inaudible 00:03:53] and my husband had about 90, we lost 20 of those. We [00:04:00] had the water, the cistern where they drank the water from the [well 00:04:10], the cistern to the tank, got something in it, and so we had to dip water out of this cistern to water the cattle, it was horrible. They finally got that fixed, but it was just terrible.

Speaker 1: Were there any fatalities in the area that you know of?

Patricia: Yes, there was a neighbor's, her brother was taking a load of hogs to dinner, and he had his wife and a little daughter with him, a little baby, and they got stuck. There was a trucker there in a big semi, so his wife and little kid got in there, and

he walked. He got to this ranch and he wanted help, and they said they couldn't help, so he kept going, but he froze, froze to death. His name was Wayne [Yule 00:05:04].

Speaker 1: I heard about that story.

Patricia: Yeah.

Speaker 1: Actually, I found a photo.

Patricia: Oh, did you?

Speaker 1: Yeah, of where they found him.

Patricia: That's the only fatality that I knew about. It is a miracle there weren't more.

Speaker 1: Yeah, and how did you fare through the storm? Were you, you know, worried that things might not work out so well?

Patricia: Well, I, you know, just that it was going to quit, but it didn't. It was like 30 below, and 70 mile an hour winds.

Speaker 1: The drifts must have been enormous.

Patricia: They were terrible. In this flat country, there's no protection for the cattle.

Speaker 1: I guess, the drifts, they'd need something to drift up to though, like a bush. [00:06:00]

Patricia: Well, there was just deep snow most everywhere, and big drifts. It lasted for forever, it was so long because they'd get the roads open and they would [blow/go 00:06:14] shut. We had several people stay with us because they got stuck.

Speaker 1: Right. That's also another thing I read about. A lot of people really, you know, I was surprised to hear you say that one family couldn't help. You know, from what I was reading, a lot of people just really opened their homes.

Patricia: Well, they wanted him to stay there, but he just was wanting to find ... but there was no way anybody could help, you know? And his wife and daughter were okay.

Speaker 1: But people that got stranded on the roads sometimes found ranches.

Patricia: Mm-hmm (affirmative), we had people stay with us.

Speaker 1: Did you experience any of the lightening and thunder that Francis was talking about?

Patricia: No, I didn't.

Speaker 1: It's a different, the storm was different in different areas.

Patricia: It was just a noisy storm. It was just, I don't know. I'd never seen anything like it, and I hope I never do again.

Speaker 1: Anything else you can think of?

Patricia: Not really. I didn't get to see my folks for about six weeks. I was homesick. I grew up with trees around, and it was just flat country.

Speaker 1: I guess when the snow hit it was maybe even flatter, just featureless, almost, except for the drifts, I guess.

Patricia: Mm-hmm (affirmative), yeah. Well, it was just deep all over, and then drifts.

Speaker 1: So when you went out, I mean, was it waist-deep?

Patricia: Well, [00:08:00] it was more than that, I think. It was hard, you walked on the snow. My dad and my family were at my grandmother's house, and they stayed there that night and he walked home after the blizzard. They were there like a week before he could get home.

Speaker 1: How far of a walk was that?

Patricia: It was only like 3 miles or so.

Speaker 1: Still, in those kind of temperatures, in that kind of wind.

Patricia: One of the neighbors was snowed in [Lusk 00:08:37] and he walked home clear to north of Harrison. He [inaudible 00:08:41] sitting on the top of a telephone pole, it was that deep.

Speaker 1: I just can't imagine drifts that deep.

Patricia: It was unreal, and it took a long time for it to go away because it kept snowing and blowing.

Speaker 1: Yeah [Jim 00:09:06] and I read it went all the way, you know, basically almost to the end of February.

Patricia: Yeah, it did. I remember we sold our yearlings that fall for 17 cents a pound.

Speaker 1: And that was a bad price?

Patricia: A terrible price.

Speaker 1: I also had heard that you could tell a lot of the cattle that made it through the blizzard because they'd be missing parts of their ears and tails. Did you see any of that?

Patricia: No, well not really, but some of the cows had their necks turned and they couldn't straighten them out. It was ...

Speaker 1: It's gruesome.

Patricia: It was gruesome. I'm just surprised more people didn't freeze.

Speaker 1: I think the state total was sixteen deaths.

Patricia: Was it really?

Speaker 1: [inaudible 00:09:56]

Patricia: In Wyoming.

Speaker 1: Yeah.[00:10:00]

Patricia: That's about all I remember.

Speaker 1: Okay, thank you for talking with me.

Patricia: You're welcome.

Speaker 1: Great.